

the Oakland City Council.

Furthermore, over the last eighteen months since the elections, the Panthers had developed their most successful community programs. With a free clinic, an impressive daily school, three-day-a-week busing of visitors to the prisons, a senior citizens escort service and a wide range of educational, political and community service activities at their intercommunal center, including Sunday services at the Son of Man Temple, the Panthers had sunk deep roots into the community.

In this context, the latest blows to the Panthers began. Last April, almost a hundred Oakland police broke into a ghetto apartment where fourteen black

doorman knows, the neighbors know, and I know." This precaution did not stop the Oakland police from raiding his apartment, allegedly to seek evidence of Newton's role in a street beating incident six months earlier.

Newton was arrested twice, and his bail and that of his constant "bodyguard" companion totalled more than \$60,000. Both times the police chose to arrest Newton, his attorney, Charles Garry, was out of town and was not notified. Garry had a long-standing agreement with the Oakland police and the Justice Department that he would be contacted whenever they had a warrant for a Panther so that he could arrange a surrender and prevent provocative police raids.

**Forfeited Property.** The Panthers managed to pay Newton's bail of \$42,000 by signing over title to their intercommunal center and the Party headquarters. But two weeks ago, after he was scheduled for arraignment on more charges, ranging from assault to misprision (concealment of a felony), he failed to show up for a court appearance. The Party's property was forfeited.

Police harassment of the Panthers is anything but new. The latest round of problems differed because they resulted in part from the Panthers' increasing involvement in the ghetto community. For example, several recent incidents with police occurred in a downtown Oakland bar in which the Panthers are known to have an interest. Black vice-squad police—easily recognizable to Panthers who went to school with them—began to hang out at the bar and to demand free drinks and free tricks. The bar, like a dozen others in downtown Oakland, has its quota of prostitutes and drug-dealers, which provided a convenient excuse for police interference. The fact that the Panthers, the prostitutes, the drug-dealers and the vice-squad grew up in the same neighborhood and to some extent overlapped did not help to draw a line between the Panthers and the other activities in and around the bar.

The last weeks before Newton's disappearance, coming after repeated police, Treasury Department and FBI harassment, were filled with internal squabbles over what to do next. There have been varying reports of last-minute falling out among the figures involved.

If the Black Panther Party has a future, it may ride on the fortunes of Elaine Brown. Audacious as ever, she announced her new candidacy for Oakland City Council the day after Huey vanished, and she promised that a full slate of candidates would soon be named. □ *Larry Bensky*



Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, 1969

## Panther's Last Gasp?

Huey Newton, the Minister of Defense, vanished; Bobby Seale, the Chairman, "vacationing" in southern California; David Hilliard (until recently the Party Secretary) in prison; Eldridge Cleaver in silent exile.

The work which local, state and federal police began in 1968, six months after the Black Panther Party was founded, seems virtually complete. With the exception of Elaine Brown, who moved to the Panther's Oakland headquarters in 1969 after surviving the massive Los Angeles police raids on the Panthers' offices, the vintage Panther leaders are all gone, victims of internal and external pressures.

**Panther Challenge.** The city of Oakland, 40% black, with no liberal democratic constituency, a young and growing black electorate, and an economy dominated by multi-national corporate interests, is ripe to come under some kind of black control. The strength of the Panther campaign to establish that control was demonstrated in April 1973 when Bobby Seale ran for Mayor of Oakland and forced incumbent Mayor John Redding into a runoff. Seale lost the election but won 37% of the vote. Elaine Brown polled 40% and was nearly elected to

men, women and children lived, claiming "hot pursuit" of a "suspect" who wasn't present, didn't live there, and when caught was soon released with no charges. All fourteen residents were handcuffed and carted away, but the real target was their apartment. It contained precinct rolls, voter-registration figures, contributor lists, and organization charts from the party's well-organized electoral effort in 1973. The people were released two days later; the records remain in the hands of the police.

During this past summer Huey Newton's penthouse was raided twice in two months by police. This \$600-per-month apartment on the shores of Lake Merritt, which Newton once contemplated from the seventh floor of the Oakland City Jail, had been the object of public criticism and private snickers because of its apparent extravagance. Newton said he moved to the expensive apartment (which doubled as an office) so that he would not be subjected to "accidental" police raids in the Oakland flatland slums. "When they come here," he said two years ago, "the